



File Code: 1920/1950

Date: June 8, 2009

Subject: Miller West Fisher Project-Specific Amendment – Open Road Density in MA 12

To: Forest Supervisor

INTRODUCTION

The Miller West Fisher Record of Decision (ROD) would suspend the following Forest Plan standard in order to implement the selected alternative:

Management Area 12 Facilities Standard #3

"Roads open to public use will not exceed an average density of $\frac{3}{4}$ mile per square mile within the contiguous MA."

(Forest Plan, Volume I, p. III-51)

BACKGROUND

The Miller West Fisher project area is in the Silverfish Planning Subunit (PSU). The Silverfish PSU is approximately 69,419 acres in size and is located approximately 22 miles south of Libby, Montana on the Libby Ranger District. The legal description of the project area includes all or portions of T27N, R31W, T27N, R30W, T27N, R29W, T26N, R29W, T26N, R30W; T26N, R31W, T25N, R31W, T25N, R30W, T25N, R29W, Lincoln County, Montana.

Alternative 6-modified, the selected alternative, is comprised of timber harvest and associated fuel treatment on 1,898 acres, 3.29 miles of temporary road construction, precommercial thinning on approximately 351 acres, prescribed fire over 2,830 acres, road storage on 19.20 miles of road, decommissioning on 1.43 miles of road, pool creation in Miller Creek, stream bank stabilization in West Fisher Creek, access changes to protect water quality and big game security, improvements of trails and trailheads, fuels reduction and hazard tree removal in Lake Creek Campground, spring development in the North Fork of Miller Creek, removal of a fish barrier on Road 2314, and design features and mitigation measures to protect resource values.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE AMENDMENT

The purpose and need for this project is to: maintain the vigor and long-term productivity of forest stands; reduce hazardous fuels and restore natural fire regimes; provide forest products; reduce impacts of the road network on water quality and wildlife, while providing access for public and administrative use; maintain or improve watershed condition; maintain or improve grizzly bear and big game habitat; improve recreation experience through trail reconstruction and hazard reduction in Lake Creek Campground.

There would be approximately 5,093 acres of Management Area (MA) 12, Big Game Summer Range within the project area. Road 4782 is restricted yearlong to motorized vehicles including over the snow vehicles. The road is closed with a gate at the junction with Road 231, the West Fisher Road. Timber harvest Units 116, 117, 118a, 118b, 119, 120, and 121 are located behind this closure. Access behind the gate on road 4782 would increase ORD in MA 12 during the logging of these units from the existing 1.3 miles/square mile to 2.13 miles/square mile.



The proposed units would benefit big game through increasing the ratio of forage within the project area. This increase in forage is more consistent with historic levels, and more beneficial to elk.

EXISTING CONDITION

Current ORD within MA 12 in the Silverfish PSU is 1.30 miles per square mile (mi/sq mi) (FEIS pg. 2-46; pg. 3-331) and does not represent the desired conditions identified in the Forest Plan, which specifies open road densities in MA 12 equal to or less than 0.75 mi/sq mi (Forest Plan pg. III-51).

PROPOSED ACTIVITY

The Preferred Alternative (Alternative 6-modified) proposes to amend the Forest Plan on a project-specific basis to exceed ORD in MA 12 for the Silverfish Planning Subunit during implementation of the Miller West Fisher project. Table 1 displays the existing ORD, the ORD during project implementation period and post-project ORD.

Table 1 - ORD's in Silverfish PSU for MA 12 (mi/mi²)

Existing ORD	1.30
Activity Period ORD	2.13
Post Project ORD	1.30

In order to harvest these units, it is necessary to be active in MA 12 during the summer use period due to heavy winter snowfall in the project area during the winter and the lack of economic feasibility of winter logging due to the extra cost of snow plowing and winter harvest activity. The proposed timber harvest will benefit elk through improving the cover/forage ratio through increased forage levels. The project area currently has a 92/8 cover forage ratio in MA 12, whereas desired condition for elk is 60/40 (FEIS Table 3-85, page 3-330). Alternative 6 activities would improve cover/forage ratio for elk to 74/26.

ALTERNATIVES/MITIGATION CONSIDERED

An action alternative that does not exceed Forest Plan Standards for ORD in MA 12 was not considered in detail because it would require the closure of roads under Lincoln County jurisdiction (FEIS pg. 2-17). Alternative 7 included winter logging of all units in MA 12 that would require opening a closed road, or constructing a temporary road. This alternative is described in Chapter 2 of the FEIS (pg. 2-35) and analyzed in detail throughout Chapter 3. Alternative 7 was not selected because it would not be economically feasible (FEIS pg. 3-459, Table 3-126).

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

The public was notified that an amendment would be needed to implement the project. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) states that Alternative 6 would not meet Forest Plan standards for ORD in MA 12 and would require a Forest Plan amendment. The Miller West Fisher DEIS has been through a 45-day comment period.

EFFECTS ANALYSIS

Direct and Indirect:

Alternative 6-modified includes timber harvest in MA 12, big game summer range. These treatments are accessed by a road system that includes a road that is restricted yearlong to motorized vehicles. Analysis of effects to big game indicates that these treatments will improve the cover/forage ratio in big game summer range. Disturbance from use of the closed road will be temporary in nature, likely lasting only one or two seasons. No openings greater than 40 acres in size would be created. Travel corridors for wildlife would be maintained in riparian zones through protection of riparian habitat conservation areas (RHCA's) (FEIS pg. 3-335).

The FEIS discloses the anticipated effects of the increase in ORD on big game species (FIES pp. 3-335 to 3-336) during project activity. The analysis focuses on habitat security due to increased open road densities. Habitat security typically decreases as open road density increases within the Miller West Fisher project area. Alternative 6-modified will directly increase the ORD within big game summer range, increasing the potential for displacement of elk within a cow elk home range (FEIS pg. 3-337). However, post-project ORD would decrease back to project-area existing condition. Post-project the ORD in MA 12 in the Silverfish PSU will be 1.30 mi/mi².

No long-term effects are anticipated for Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive (TES) Species. Effects to TES species have been analyzed and are contained in the Biological Assessment and Biological Evaluation located in the Wildlife Project File. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has consulted on the findings of the Biological Assessment and has concurred with the findings that the Miller West Fisher project *may affect but is not likely to adversely affect* the grizzly bear, gray wolf (recently delisted), or Canada lynx. The project *may impact individuals and/or habitat, but would not contribute to a trend toward federal listing or loss of species viability* for the black-backed woodpecker, fisher, flammulated owl, Townsend's big-eared bat, western toad, or wolverine. The project would have *no impact* on the bald eagle or peregrine falcon.

Cumulative

This modification is for the Silverfish Planning Subunit only. It does not apply to other areas on the Kootenai National Forest, although other situations have arisen on the Forest where a similar modification is needed. For example, the Young J Fire Rehabilitation EA of 2002, the Gold/Boulder/Sullivan EIS of 2001, the Pink Stone Fire Recovery EIS of 2001, the White Pine Creek Project FEIS of 2004, the Pipestone FEIS of 2004, the Bristow Area Restoration Project EA of 2004, the McSutton EIS of 2005, the Alder and Cow EA's (Riverview Planning Subunit) of 2005, and the Young Dodge EIS of 2008, and the Brush Creek Fire Salvage of 2008 all include Forest Plan amendments for MA 12 Facilities Standard #3. The cumulative effects of amendments to the Kootenai Forest Plan were analyzed in the *Cumulative Effects of Past Projects on Wildlife, Kootenai National Forest* (Johnson 2006) and the findings were considered in evaluating the potential effects of this project-specific amendment.

Forest-wide, monitoring results show that overall, open road density has decreased (KNF Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report, Fiscal Year 2007). These reductions in open roads have improved security habitat conditions. The KNF Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report, Fiscal Year 2007 (page 14), goes on to say:

“Forest-wide (including MAs 15 and 16): Since there is limited historical (first 10 years) data available for just MA 12 or the biological summer range on habitat effectiveness, the information for all Forest lands (all MAs) is used to show the probable trend. The trend in habitat effectiveness shows an improving condition (shown in Table C-1-2). This same trend is likely on summer range (both MA 12 and biological).

Table C-1-2 Forest-wide Elk Habitat Effectiveness Trend

Year	Open Miles	Closed Miles	Total Miles	% Closed	ORD* (mi/sq mi)	Habitat Effectiveness %**
1987	4,530	1,670	6,200	27	1.3	56
1988	3,707	3,195	6,972	46	1.1	58
1992	3,364	3,785	7,149	53	1.0	60
1997	3,082	4,275	7,357	57	0.91	62
2002	2,934	4,982	7,954	63	0.86	63
2007	2,905	4,978	7,883	63	0.86	63

* ORD = Open miles/3,373 square miles (Area of KNF capable of providing elk habitat- summer and winter)

** Figure 2 pg. 13 in: USDA FS, MFWP, C S & K Tribes, PC Timber Inc. 1985. Elk Habitat Timber Management Relations Central Zone Northern Region. 20 pp.

In 1988, when Forest-wide habitat effectiveness (HE) was 58 percent, the elk population potential index was 5,000 elk. At the end of the 10 year monitoring period (1997) habitat effectiveness has reached 62 percent, with a resulting increase (31 percent) in the elk potential population index (6,555 elk). At the end of the third five year reporting period, habitat effectiveness was up to 63 percent. At the end of 2007 HE remains at 63 percent. This maintains the elk potential population index at 6,660 elk. While HE has not increased over the past 5 years, there has been a 71 mile decrease with decommissioning. The Plan projected a population potential increase of 3,000 elk over a 30 year time frame. The increases in the elk potential population index are occurring quicker than projected in the Forest Plan. One reason is the less than expected road construction on MA 16 and others. These lands have been able to provide higher summer range habitat values than projected in the Plan. See monitoring item C-2 for more information on the elk population.”

CHANGES TO THE FOREST PLAN THAT ARE NOT SIGNIFICANT:

Our determination of whether this proposed amendment is significant was done using the process in the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook, Section 1926.51. The handbook states that changes to the land management plan that are not significant can result from four specific situations. This project-specific amendment is compared to those situations below:

1.) Actions that do not significantly alter the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management.

This MA 12 ORD amendment does not alter the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management. The goal of MA 12 is to maintain or enhance non-winter big-game habitat and produce a programmed yield of timber (Forest Plan Vol. 1, page III-48).

In order to provide access to timber harvest units during project implementation, it is necessary to exceed ORD standards in MA 12 in the Silverfish Planning Subunit during implementation of the project. Implementation of harvest units accessed from road 4782 is expected to last approximately one to two years. Open road densities would exceed standards during the implementation of seven units. Roads that are currently closed to motor vehicle access would remain closed following project implementation.

This amendment is for the MA 12 lands in the Silverfish Planning Subunit only. This project-specific amendment would be short-term in nature as it only applies for the length of the Miller West Fisher project. The total acres in the Silverfish Planning Subunit are approximately 69,419 acres in size with 60,519 acres being National Forest System lands. This project approval would affect approximately 5,093 acres of MA 12 summer range within the Silverfish Planning Subunit. The temporary increase in ORD would cause only a minor reduction in big game habitat since the activity affects less than 1% of the total 1.3 million acres of MA 12 allocation on the Kootenai National Forest. Forest-wide monitoring results indicate that open road densities have decreased since 1987 with a resulting increase in habitat security.

2.) Adjustments of management area boundaries or management prescriptions resulting from further on-site analysis when the adjustments do not cause significant changes in the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management.

This MA 12 ORD amendment does not adjust management area boundaries or management prescriptions.

3.) Minor changes in standards and guidelines.

This amendment to MA 12 ORD is a minor temporary change to the standard. The change allows for achievement of the dual MA goals to produce a programmed yield of timber while maintaining big-game habitat. It provides for more site-specific application of ORD standards to meet the purpose and need for the project while meeting the need to implement

the project without excessive logging costs due to snow plowing and conducting logging operations in deep snow.


4.) Opportunities for additional projects or activities that will contribute to achievement of the management prescription.

This MA 12 ORD amendment permits activities to take place that improve the cover/forage ratio for elk through increasing the amount of forage. The existing cover/forage ratio in MA 12 for the PSU is 92/8. The recommended cover/forage ratio for elk is 60/40 (FEIS page 3-330). Clearly forage is limited in MA 12, and this amendment allows activity to take place that improves the cover/forage ratio.

CONCLUSION – EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE

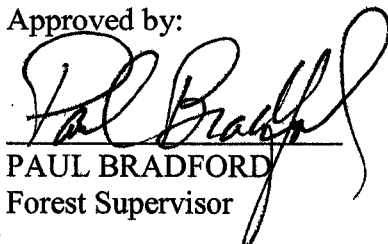
Based on a review of the four factors identified in the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook, 1926.51, and considering the Forest Plan in its entirety, I have determined that the adoption of this project-specific amendment to the Kootenai Forest Plan is not significant. This amendment is fully consistent with, but further refines the means to achieve current Forest Plan goals and objectives and provide big game summer habitat. Consideration has also been given to the cumulative effects of this action in addition to other similar actions across the Kootenai National Forest.


Recommended by:


KATHY RODRIGUEZ
Forest Planner


Date

Approved by:


PAUL BRADFORD
Forest Supervisor


Date

**KOOTENAI FOREST PLAN
LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
June 2009**

Silverfish Planning Subunit Project-Specific Amendment

The Kootenai National Forest Plan, page III-51, in Management Area (MA) 12 is modified for Facilities Standard #3, to change the ORD from 0.75 miles of open road per square mile in this MA, in the Silverfish Planning Subunit, to the values displayed in Table 2 below. The modification applies only to the Silverfish Planning Subunit which is located on the Libby Ranger District. This amendment only applies during a portion of the project implementation, which is expected to be approximately one to two years, as the Forest Plan ORD standard would be met after project completion.

**Table 2 - Open Road Densities (ORD) in MA 12 in the Silverfish Planning Subunit
(miles/square mile)**

Existing ORD	1.30
Activity Period ORD	2.13
Post Project ORD	1.30

The current standard for Management Area 12, Facilities Standard #3 (Forest Plan, Vol. 1, p. III-51) is:
"Roads open to public use will not exceed an average density of ¼ mile per square mile within the contiguous MA."

The Forest Plan states, "If it is determined during project design that the best way to meet the goals of the Forest Plan conflicts with a Forest Plan standard, the Forest Supervisor may approve an exception to that standard for that project."

This project specific amendment allows achievement of the overall Forest Plan goal for this Management Area, which is to "maintain or enhance non-winter big-game habitat (i.e. summer/ fall) and produce a programmed yield of timber. The major species include black bear, grizzly bear, elk, moose, whitetail deer, and mule deer (Forest Plan, Vol. 1, p. III-48)."

The EA shows that increasing the existing ORD from 1.30 to 2.13 miles per square mile during project activities would not result in long-term effects to population viability (FEIS page 3-331).

Project specific amendments must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act procedures. Compliance with these procedures and rationale for this project specific amendment is contained in the Miller West Fisher DEIS, FEIS and ROD.

Approval Date: June 8, 2009

**LIST OF PAST PROJECT-SPECIFIC AMENDMENTS TO
MA 12 FACILITIES STANDARD #3**

Project Specific Amendments						
FY Year	District	Date Signed	Decision Name	Standard Amended	Description	Years in effect
1992	Three Rivers	06/09/92	Arbo Creek	Exceed water yield, MA 12 ORD, MA 12 cover/forage ratios, allow timber salvage in MA 2	Water yield created by existing situation	ORD increase for this life of the sales; MA 2 salvage for the life of the sale, cover forage ratios for 10-15 years
	Three Rivers	06/09/92	4th of July	Exceed water yield, MA 12 ORD, MA 12 cover/forage ratios, allow timber salvage in MA 2	Water yield created by existing situation	ORD increase for this life of the sales; MA 2 salvage for the life of the sale, cover forage ratios for 10-15 years
1993	Rexford	07/23/93	Compartment 10	MA 12, FS#3	Exceed ORD until 1994	2 years
	Rexford	04/25/93	Dodge Creek Heli	MA 12, FS #3	Exceed ORD until 1994	2 years
	Murphy Lake	07/12/93	Meadow View	MA 12, FS #3	ORD of 1.0 during sale; .75 after	2 years
	Libby	12/14/93	Purcell	MA 12 FS #3; MA 14 FS#4 in comp 504; MA 15/16/17/18, WS #2 in comp 503	ORD increase during project activities.	2 years
	Libby	06/14/93	Thomas/Gulch Rainy Blue	MA 12, FS #3	ORD of 3.3 (max) during Dec-Aug; .6 after	2 years
	Libby	07/02/93	Weigel Creek	MA 12, FS #3	ORD of 1.9; .6 after	2 years

Project Specific Amendments						
FY Year	District	Date Signed	Decision Name	Standard Amended	Description	Years in effect
1994	Libby	04/29/94	Tepee Salvage	MA 12, FS #3	ORD max 2.3 in Comp 33; 1.5 in Comp 43; ORD after sale .7 in Comp 33, 0 in Comp 43	2 years
	Cabinet	10/19/93	Gray Woodchuck	MA 12, FS #3	ORD 1.85 during sale; .75 after	3 years
	Rexford	07/27/95	Webb	MA 12, FS #3	ORD 1.12 during sale; .44 after	2 years
1995	Rexford	01/05/95	Compartment 2	MA 12, FS #3	ORD 1.3 during sale; .75 after	2 years
	Libby	04/26/95	Dry Fork Salvage	MA 12, FS #3	ORD 2.1 during sale; .75 after	1 year
	Libby	05/11/95	Road 4904K; Mushroom harvest	MA 12, FS #3	ORD 1.5 during picking	1 year
	Libby	06/27/95	Cripple Horse Salvage	MA 12, FS #3	ORD 2.1 during sale; .7 after	1 year
	Libby	06/27/95	Brush Creek Salvage	MA 12, FS #3	ORD 1.4 during sale; .75 after	1 year
	Libby	08/18/95	Peace Alexander Salvage	MA 12, FS #3	ORD up to 2.5 during sale; 0.75 after	1 year
1996	Libby	01/10/96	Little Wolf	MA 12, FS #3	ORD max 2.3 in Comp 33; 1.5 in Comp 43; ORD after sale .7 in Comp 33, 0 in Comp 43.	2 years
	Rexford	09/24/96	Huckleberry Salvage	MA 12, FS #3	Existing ORD .65, during sale 1.03, after sale .65	2 years
	Libby	10/21/96	Warland Salvage	MA 12, FS #3	Existing ORD 2.6, during sale 2.05, after sale .66	2 years
1997	Libby	10/23/96	Bristow Salvage	MA 12, FS #3	Existing ORD 1.27, during sale 1.27, after sale 0.74	2 years
	Rexford	11/18/96	Burro Face Salvage	MA 12, FS #3	Existing ORD 1.01, during sale 1.49, after sale 0.75	3 years
	Rexford	06/06/97	McSutton Salvage	MA 12, FS #3	Existing ORD .81, during sale 1.53, after sale 0.75	3 years

Project Specific Amendments						
FY Year	District	Date Signed	Decision Name	Standard Amended	Description	Years in effect
	Libby	06/19/97	Cripple Horse Timber Sale	MA 12, FS #3	Comp 609 Existing ORD 1.4, during sale 2.2, after sale 1.4 (this is allowed for under amendment #8) Comp 610 existing ORD .9, during sale 2.2, after sale 0.0	2 years
1998	Libby	1/23/98	Alexander Salvage Timber Sale	MA 12 FS #3	Comp 601, overlaps with amendments for Peace Alexander, Will allow ORD to go to 2.0, after sale .63	2 years
	Libby	6/9/98	Grubb Salvage Timber Sale	MA 12 FS#3	Comp 643, existing ORD 0.0, during project 1.53, after 0.0	1-2 years
1998	Libby	06/17/98	North Fork Jackson Salvage Timber Sale	MA 12, FS #3	Comp 602 Existing ORD .75, during sale 1.5, after sale .75	1 years
1999	Rexford	6/16/99	Pinkham Timber Sales	MA 12 FS#3	Comp. 18 and 21 Existing ORD is 1.51 and will increase to 1.81 during activity.	3-5 years
	Libby	6/23/99	Dry Pocks Timber Sale	MA 12 FS#3	Comp 579, existing ORD 0.0, during project 1.0, after 0.0.	3 years
2000	Libby	6/16/00	Syrup Salvage	MA 12, FS#3	Comp 578, existing ORD .34, During 2.1, after .34	3 years
2001	Libby	10/00	Alexander Timber Sale	MA 12, FS #3	Comp 551, existing ORD .33, During 2.0, after .33	3 years
2002	Rexford	10/5/01	Pink Stone Fire Recovery	MA12, FS #3	ORD to increase to 2.70 during activities	2-5 years
	Rexford	12/14/01	Gold/Boulder/Sullivan	MA 12, Facilities Standard #3	ORD Increase to 1.52 during activities.	5-7 years

Project Specific Amendments						
FY Year	District	Date Signed	Decision Name	Standard Amended	Description	Years in effect
	Cabinet	6/17/02	White Pine	MA 12, Facilities Standard #3	Temporary increase in ORD from 0.71 to 2.23	5 years
2003	Rexford	10/11/02	Young J	MA 12, Facilities Standard #3	ORD Increase to 1.19 during activities.	2 years
2004	Libby	6/2/04	Pipestone	MA 12, Facilities Standard #3	ORD increases in 3 compartments during activities. Post-project ORDs at or below existing levels for 5 compartments.	3-5 years
	Libby	6/16/04	South McSwede	MA 12, Facilities Standard #3	Comp 539 existing and during project ORD of 3.88, post-project ORD of 2.44. Comp 540 existing and during project ORD of 1.20, post-project ORD of 1.20.	3-5 years
	Libby	6/16/04	Bristow	MA 12, Facilities Standard #3	For planning subunit, ORD increase from existing level of 1.0 to 1.5 during activity period. Post-project ORD of 0.78	3-5 years
2005	Rexford	5/14/05	McSuttien	MA 12, Facilities Standard #3	ORD increase to 1.00 during activities.	10 years
	Libby	6/15/05	Riverview (Alder, Cow)	MA 12, Facilities Standard #3	ORD of 1.30 during activities, post project ORD of 0.96 compared to existing ORD of 2.00.	5 years
2008	Rexford	4/25/08	Young Dodge	MA 12, Facilities Standard #3	Management at the existing ORD of 0.81 during, and following of project activities.	3-6 years
2008	Libby	4/28/08	Brush Creek Fire Salvage	MA 12, Facilities Standard #3	Temporary increase in ORD from 1.30 to 2.13	1 to 2 years